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ABSTRACT

This theme issue discusses family literacy in six articles, covering: (1) visions of family literacy from research and practice; (2) a family-to-family tutoring model (Susan Weinbeck); (3) a strengths learning model (Meta W. Potts); (4) the LVA/GTE (Literary Volunteers of America/General Telephone and Electronics Corporation) family literacy project (Michael Buchholz); (5) outreach to rural families (Susan E. Perkins); and (6) relevant policy papers on family literacy. The visions of family literacy found in research are often disparate from those found in practice. One of the benefits of family to family tutoring is that all adults involved can experience empowerment, both as teachers and as learners. A strengths learning model emphasizes that adults have skills on which literacy practitioners may build. The LVA/GTE family literacy project encourages parents to read to their children and children to read to their parents. Reaching rural families involves several strategies related to: identification and recruitment; screening and preparation; program design and support services; home-based programs; instructional programs; staff development; and collaborations with other community members. The National Center on Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania publishes an array of policy briefs related to adult literacy. (JW)



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Family Literacy Issue

# Literacy Practitioner

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ED 388 409

## Visions of Family Literacy: Snapshots from Research and Practice

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Ellen Goldsmith
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*Let's begin with snapshots of literacy, the context within which we're all working. From the perspective of children, the Carnegie Study from 1991 tells us that 35% of children come to kindergarten unprepared to learn to read. From the perspective of adults, the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) tells us that 90 million adults have inadequate literacy skills.*

*Turning away from reality to aspirations, the next set of snapshots comes from Goals 2000: Educate America Act, passed in 1994 by the United States Congress. Goal 1 states that all children in America will start school ready to learn. Goal 6 calls for every adult American to be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Goal 8 asks every school to promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participate in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.*

How do these pictures relate? There are great discontinuities. In fact, at present they do not exist in the same frame. At the very least, it is a big job to bring them into focus with each other. Family literacy can make a major contribution to bring these pictures into the same field of vision.

To begin to suggest how family literacy can make connections between the reality and the hope, I use the metaphor of bridges. Thinking about the characteristics and requirements of bridges: two-way traffic, good materials – different depending on what they're spanning, different levels, views, and the possibility for different destinations – gives ideas for family literacy. Family literacy can provide explicit bridges between children's and adults' literacy development.

### Research Roots of Family Literacy

The research roots of family literacy provide the knowledge base for programs, a theoretical grounding for action. In thinking about family literacy, a valid question is what's new? Certainly, there is nothing new about family literacy practices. What is new is programs with an explicit focus on adults and children as a learning unit, an idea first put forward as a basis for family literacy by Ruth Nickse (1985), and the view that a joined effort to promote adults' and children's learning will be more successful than a separate focus.

The following research shows how a broad base motivates and informs the development of family literacy programs as well as the funding of family literacy initiatives. The first example focuses on the family and learning. According to Sticht & McDonald (1989), children acquire their basic cognitive and linguistic skills within the context of the family. A group can embrace new values and pass them on to the children. Yet change is slow. The next studies relate to the timing of learning. According to Taylor (1982), Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988), and Teale and Sulzby (1986), much literacy learning takes place in the years preceding formal instruction in the context of family-based interactions and activities.

The next two citations concern the role of parents. According to Applebee, Langer, & Mullis (1988) school achievement and test scores are higher for children whose parents have more education and more books in the home. According to Newman & Beverstock (1990), parents who are low-literate cannot support their children's literacy learning nor pass on positive attitudes about schooling and the importance of learning to read and write as well as parents with more developed literacy. The last piece of research holds promise for adult learning. According to Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, et al. (1982) research showing reading gains for tutors as well as recipients of tutoring suggests that benefits in adult reading development would result from the parent-child interactions.

For children, family literacy hopes to change the "fade out" effect of early compensatory education. For adults, it hopes that their motivation for their children and their embracing of a family role will take them farther in educational and occupational development than programs without this dual focus.

Family literacy can draw on knowledge from many fields. A quick, autobiographical tour will show why I've come to believe that in order to work effectively, I need to know more about other academic and social disciplines.

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I came to family literacy from reading. Actually, I came to reading from English. At a branch of the City University of New York, I first was given American literature classes to teach, then composition, then remedial composition, then reading. It became apparent I needed to learn something about teaching reading which brought me to a doctoral program at Teachers College, Columbia University.

It soon became clear to me, as it could and should have in the classroom as well, that reading is not just reading, the same no matter what is read or who reads it. And it wasn't just visual. What's in the brain and how memory works is very important. So I took a course in cognitive psychology and one in psycholinguistics. As a teacher of developmental reading at a branch of the City University of New York, I found that my students' experiences and attitudes about reading were often quite different from mine. What they did with regard to reading, or didn't do, had to do with their lives. It was a social process, a social transaction. This recognition led me to sociolinguistics. At the same time, I was struck by the fact that much that was written about learning was based on children's learning in school. Maybe adult learning was different.

When I came into family literacy in 1987, I was faced with new questions and concerns. What is the relationship between children's learning and adult learning? The fields of child development and emergent literacy became important. As people began to tell stories of their families, it became clear that families are different and that families are very powerful systems. To the extent that family literacy wants to affect the family, we need to know something about family systems.

As I continued to work in family literacy and became interested in learning what effect my work was having, I realized I needed to branch out in terms of assessing impact. I wanted to know what effect participation was having from participants' perspectives. I felt I should learn something about anthropology.

This listing of research and fields hasn't, I hope, given the impression that family literacy is a patchwork of other fields of study. I don't think it is.

**"Parents who are low-literate cannot support their children's literacy learning nor pass on positive attitudes about schooling and the importance of learning to read and write as well as parents with more developed literacy."**

But I do believe a major challenge for family literacy and also a very exciting opportunity is the need to draw on best practices in relation to the many disciplines I've mentioned. I do think that bringing disparate fields together raises new questions and new challenges, for example:

- How long do programs need to last to make an impact on changing behavior?
- Which kinds of programs help which kinds of families?
- What are the relationships among poverty, literacy levels of families, and opportunities for children to experience literacy within the family context?
- Is it true that success in school is determined by parents' ability to support and extend school-like activities?
- How can family literacy programs recognize and respect cultural differences while providing experiences and materials that will foster different literacies – personal, professional, academic? How do we set things up so everyone is learning?
- How can family literacy programs promote a reciprocity of learning between home and school literacies? How do we deal with class and cultural differences so difference is perceived as difference, not deficiency?
- What specific abilities underlie early literacy experiences?
- How can we infuse family literacy programs from the beginning with the kind of literacy activities and approaches that will contribute to the development of fluent, proficient reading?

### Lessons and Examples from Research and Programs

Family literacy programs can offer a literacy dimension that reflects best practices. In doing so, family literacy programs can take advantage of the dual learning opportunities and represent richer possibilities for adults and children – not parallel play. The research and the snapshots of successful programs I'll share are not intended as a prescription or as a recipe. Rather, I hope that like any interesting picture from which different viewers take different things, some readers will see principles, some applications and others will formulate questions.

Both in relation to the research and to the snapshots of programs, I'm focusing on the shared literacy segment of family literacy

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# Families Helping Families

Susan Weinbeck
Project Coordinator, LVA - New York State

Eighteen months ago, Literacy Volunteers of America - New York State and three LVA affiliates began an innovative family literacy project, Families Helping Families, funded by an anonymous $110,000 donation. The project design explores a totally new tutoring model, a model that seeks to involve tutor/families helping learner/families with literacy and basic skills in an effort to help parents and children become collaborators for success. As the two year project nears completion, it's useful to assess what we started out to accomplish and what we've learned.

Each of the New York affiliates participating in this project – LVA Broome/Tioga in Binghamton, LVA Rochester, and LVA Ontario in Canandaigua – has been challenged by grant objectives designed to:

- examine and test the viability of a family to family tutoring process;
- broaden the partnerships among volunteer literacy, schools, social service and health agencies, civic organizations and business so that the critical issues facing families today are viewed in a community context;
- provide an educational environment that promotes literacy as a way to take collective action for positive community change; involve literacy learner/families in a participatory educational model;
- understand the linkages between literacy and community development;
- stretch LVA's traditional mission so that the organization more actively assesses prevailing approaches and instructional method. Explore new ideas that offer the possibility for the fundamental educational and social change that the remainder of the 1990's and the new century will require.

From the beginning, the Families Helping Families project required the definition of "family" to be broad since the concept of family has changed dramatically. The most common and positive characteristics exhibited by families include adaptibility, trust, humor, love, cohesion and a sense of support for members – mindful that those members are not necessarily all related to one another. What appears to define a family is a group of loving, caring, supportive people with some shared experience or interest.

Establishing linkages between pilot affiliates and community agencies has been a primary goal and the necessary ground work for recruitment and support. Effective project partnerships have included school districts, college students, immigrant resettlement agencies, Head Starts, scouts, and churches. Building on existing relationships and establishing new contacts has been a positive benefit of the project.

The great challenge for each pilot site has been the concept of training entire families as tutors and involving children as tutors. One of the adults in each tutor family has taken the 18 hour LVA tutor training in whichever format is appropriate to the student family - basic literacy or ESL. In addition, a three-hour family component has been added for all members of the tutor family. This has included an orientation to the concept of family literacy and practice in developing family literacy activities.

In Rochester, the local affiliate has matched tutors with immigrant families. Initially, the goal had been to reach the Puerto Rican population exclusively, but the project broadened its scope to include student families from Korea, Bosnia, Vietnam, and Puerto Rico. These families are quite traditional in composition: one or two parents in both the student and the tutor families with one to four children in each.

**"What appears to define a family is a group of loving, caring, supportive people with some shared experience or interest."**

At the LVA Ontario County outreach site in Geneva, the Families Helping Families project built upon a previous relationship with Head Start and has evolved into a parent support and tutoring group. A parent facilitator, an LVA tutor, and a pair of college students from the Student Literacy Corps of Hobart and William Smith Colleges are the foundation of this empowerment network. Adult participants are gaining skills and a belief in themselves as effective teachers of their children and other adults.

In Binghamton and Owego, LVA Broome/Tioga's family project provides tutoring in survival English skills to Kurdish refugee women and their children. Since the religious customs and cultural mores of the Kurds restrict Moslem women from interacting with men, tutoring is primarily a small group of the "cultural family" working with a female tutor and one or two of her children. Computers and educational software for adults and children play a central role in this Families Helping Families model.

Rediscovering children's literature has been a highlight of this project for the entire staff. Not only are children's books at the heart of a family literacy program because the goal is to impact the lives of children but they are the source of material for adult education. Another highlight was the involvement of a cultural anthropologist to help staff learn to utilize oral family histories as a tool in assessment and for recording family traits and identity.

The Families Helping Families project continues to evolve and seek new ways to engage more families in the tutoring process. What are some of the positive results so far? Parents report that after literacy classes their children are more interested in books. Parents are becoming empowered teachers; they are learning with their children and they want to continue learning and strengthening their families. We have learned that the families helping families concept is not an easy one to integrate into LVA programs, but the project has explored new family literacy models for volunteer literacy which have opened up new possibilities for the role of LVA in family learning.

# A Strengths Model for Learning

Meta W. Potts
National Center for Family Literacy
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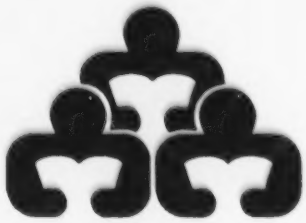
*Just as our underlying assumptions about the characteristics, abilities, and problems of adult learners affect our views of their literacy development, so do those same assumptions affect our approaches to the delivery of adult education. Whether we serve adult learners in an adult only setting or in a family literacy program, our underlying assumptions will determine our vision for adult education and limit or expand our mission.*



It has been a point of honor in the past to view ourselves—the teachers, volunteers, mentors—as professional change agents, the initiators of the expert plan that gives us power to create the adult's meaning of the need for change. We have been careful to diagnose the learner's needs and prescribe adequate treatment. Case managers, so to speak, with all good intentions, we have been delivering adult education within the parameters of a deficit model.

Lately, however, we have begun to recognize that adult learners can define the need for change themselves, can establish and share their own goals, bring their own set of experiences, background knowledge, resources and coping mechanisms to the learning. Change has become a naturally occurring process, directed by the adult with the support of the teacher.

This new education model is based upon the dual belief in resiliency – the ability of a stressed mind and body to recover from adversity and live well, and restoration – the ability to remember and renew and rebuild. Those who practice within this model deliver education within the supportive environment of a strength's model.

Identifying the learner's needs within a strength's model requires the teacher to form a partnership with the learner, linking goals, respecting mutual abilities, and agreeing to collaborate on a plan for teaching and learning. Delivery flows from the team of learners – the instructor/facilitator, the learner, the volunteer, and others in the support system.

One example of a Strengths Model for Learning, whose premise is shared teaching and learning, is the family literacy program model of the National Center for Family Literacy. Family literacy program developers and providers know that families differ enormously, but they presume that enrolled families believe in and are committed to the well-being and growth of individual family members and the family as a whole. Therefore, the majority of family literacy programs are complex and comprehensive, including components for children, parents, and family interaction.

Family literacy facilitators believe that "the only true education comes through stimulation of one's existing powers by the demands of the social situations which one experiences (Dewey 1963)." Facilitators seek to restore short-circuited powers through an educational experience which communicates an emphasis on positive characteristics of the individual and the family. Participants are encouraged "to balance internal and external resources for coping and adapting to life events and planning for the future," one of the strengths in family functioning style (Trivette, et al, 1990).

The totality of a Family Literacy Strengths Model is comprised of a set of complex and distinguishing characteristics, including attitudes about the environment in which the program is delivered, the process of goal setting, the assessment system, and instruction.

A focus on environment necessarily speaks to two aspects of influence: the aesthetic or physical environment and the emotional or social environment. A Strengths Model learning team believes that both aspects are crucial to adult learning. A quality environment expands students' experiences and encourages reflection and communication. In an ideal learning environment:

- Environment and empowerment work in tandem.
- There are basic areas for creativity and social interaction, in which individuals, small groups and large groups, can solve problems and discover, extend, and expand learning opportunities.
- Room arrangement provides visual boundaries and space for personal needs and interests. Arrangement reflects goals and interests of adult students, is culturally appropriate and encourages exploration and choice.

Goals for learning provide other opportunities for empowerment of students. Strengths minded teachers adhere to the principles of adult education, which recognize that adults have wide experience and knowledge which enhances their learning potential and enables them to share their skills to benefit other learners. The instructors set goals for themselves, making these goals known to students. Students are self-directed, determine their own goals, manage their own learning, and work with the learning team to accomplish their goals.

**"A quality environment expands students' experiences and encourages reflection and communication."**

To become participants in their own and their children's learning, adults will embark upon a journey toward achievement, collaborating with others in a joint venture. Planning, organizing, and reviewing are all part of the larger act of goal-setting and work best when they become a part of the daily routine. The process of "plan-act-and monitor" is a life skill which encourages:

**"Strengths minded teachers adhere to the principles of adult education, which recognize that adults have wide experience and knowledge which enhances their learning potential and enables them to share their skills to benefit other learners."**

- choice and competent decision-making;
- follow through on choices;
- knowledge of curricular and life-long learning opportunities;
- reflection and self evaluation;
- self-attribution;
- acceptance of responsibility for choices and actions.

Family Support Plans help learners to design and incorporate their goals into an action plan that recognizes the importance of the family system. In a system of any kind, every member of the system is profoundly affected by all other members. When changes occur in the system, every member must change if the system is to remain intact. This is particularly true if the family system has been performing in a manner that is debilitating to one or more of its members, or if the family has been thrust into unfamiliar surroundings or circumstances which threaten the family unit. An intervention, such as a positive learning experience in a Family Literacy or other adult education program, creates positive changes in one or two members, and the normal pattern of family interaction is disrupted.

If we believe that most families have some strengths and coping mechanisms, we will build upon those to address the function and structure of the family so that all members become healthier. The significant others in the lives of adult students can become a part of the communion, or they can sabotage the efforts of the partner. Strengths Model teams of learners recognize this issue and address it up front. One way is to introduce the Family Support Plan to adult students as a goal-setting strategy.

This strategy as outlined by Dunst (1990) begins with a recognition of individual and family strengths, and implicit in the design is the empowerment of parents in ways to make them more competent and capable. The authors of the plan describe it as "responsive, flexible, and fluid; highly individualized and shaped by the family; respectful of the family's cultural background and the family's willingness to share information." While this plan was not specifically designed to be used in literacy programs, the features and characteristics lend themselves to the Strengths Model approach in Family Literacy Programs. Family strengths are "viewed as fundamentally the most important element of the model, and include the knowledge, skills, and competencies of a family as manifested in the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral domains" (Seeman in Dunst, 1989). Other elements of the plan include family concerns, family needs, desired outcomes, resources and supports, partnerships, a course of action, and evaluation.

Personal Action Plans will follow the Family Support Plan and will change over time as adult learners assume new perspectives, evaluate their own progress and assume new goals. The Personal Action Plan also identifies available resources, as well as possible barriers to progress. Action steps document the movement toward the goals. Revision is often necessary and natural. While adults determine their own goals, many often express the need for guidance to identify specific and attainable goals. The learning team then works together on goals that are both individually and family focused.

The Strengths Model recognizes those cultures in which goal-setting is considered "getting ahead of yourself," and uses strategies that comply with the values and limits on how far ahead one should identify goals and dreams. Immediate goals become the focus, and the day-to-day accomplishments are celebrated as having come to term. A progress record documents the student's movement from one place in time to another, and, as such, becomes a part of the assessment system. In a Strengths Model, assessment is not a stand-alone event; it must be coupled with instruction in a systematic fashion.

Learner assessment is a vital concern for programs. Important decisions are made based on assessment information, and a learner assessment plan in a Strengths Model includes multiple measures. The careful, consistent, and sensitive use of both informal and formal measures ensures that a wide range of skills are addressed in a variety of contexts. Standardized test scores can show us how learners are performing compared to similar learners across the country, and this is an important function for program evaluation and accountability. But standardized tests may be less appropriately used to define individual strengths and needs or to express the sum total of a student's progress. Informal measures give us real evidence of learner competence, directly relate to the program curriculum, have personal meaning for students, and provide information in the affective domain. Using informal assessment measures requires considerable time, care, and planning.

**"The careful, consistent, and sensitive use of both informal and formal measures ensures that a wide range of skills are addressed in a variety of contexts."**

Journals help students crystallize their thoughts and provide a valuable tool for reflection. Journal entries, early in the program year or at the beginning of a classroom activity, serve as good informal assessments of "where learners are." Over time, journals may show growth in academic and personal areas, such as writing fluency and

mechanics, vocabulary development, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and plans. Significant entries, selected by the learners, may become a part of their portfolio.

Those who use the portfolio as authentic assessment are proponents of shared responsibility for assessment: both students and instructors select entries that authenticate the student's growth. According to Popp (1992), "portfolios are not simply a different method; they require a redefinition of student and teacher roles in assessment." Although still in the developmental/ experimental phase as an academic assessment tool, portfolio assessment is recognized as useful in the Strengths Model because its use recognizes the students' ability to evaluate their own progress. The portfolio is particularly useful in family literacy programs because it provides a way to document change in parent/child relationships.

**"The portfolio is particularly useful in family literacy programs because it provides a way to document change in parent/child relationships."**

Authentic assessment is constructive assessment and leads to organic instruction. The instructional process in the Strengths Model is developed with participation by learners, and specifically for the learners in each project. The content for language study comes from real life; in a family literacy program the most accessible, applicable, and curiosity-provoking content is context-centered and culturally appropriate.

One focus for Strengths Model instruction is the healthy traits of families. Maria Krysan (1990) cites Stinnet who proposes that a successful or strong and healthy family "creates a sense of positive family identity, promotes satisfying fulfilling interaction among members, encourages the development of family group and individual members, and is able to deal with stress." There are many models of family functioning that point out critical attributes of success and Krysan (1990) says "there seems to be a consensus about the basic dimensions of a strong, healthy family." Characteristics that are frequently mentioned by researchers and those which are cross-cultural include:

- communication styles that encourage give and take;
- encouragement of individuals to reach their goals;
- commitment to family, a feeling of closeness and attachment;
- religious orientation or spiritual wholeness;
- social connectedness rather than isolation or separation;
- ability to adapt to new, unusual, and difficult situations;
- expressions of appreciation for small and large efforts;
- clear roles and carrying out of responsibilities;
- time together.

The healthy family seeks to build and fortify the self-esteem of each of its members: they are made to feel significant, competent, powerful, and worthy. What does this mean to the curriculum planner whose task it is to address the needs for literacy enhancement? It gives us a place to start, even without formal assessment. It motivates the teachers to accept responsibility for making their programs unique and responsive to the individuals in the group. It grounds the curriculum in the culture of the group, and it connects family interest and practice to the development of literacy, giving dignity and authority to the parents' experience and beliefs.

Intense curriculum planning does not precede but follows a collection of data. The healthy traits of the particular group with whom we are working are unique and become the focus for planning. The questions are – What strengths or traits are present in your family? Which ones would you like to develop further?

We have learned that the process must be group-specific in order to develop a culturally-relevant set of lessons, and it must be the students, themselves, and not the instructor, who select traits. Once traits are identified that are important and significant to that particular group, a list of observable characteristics is compiled and the instructor can decide materials and methods for application and intervention.

For example, assume the group chose "communication" – a productive area for intervention – as one of the target traits. A list of observable characteristics of healthy family communication might be:

- They show interest in other family members by asking questions about their activities.
- They listen attentively and actively to what other family members say, possibly summarizing the message, rephrasing it, or asking for clarification.
- They respond to messages with voice, eyes, and body language.
- They write notes to those in the household and letters to those in other places.
- They own and express feelings, both positive and negative.

In another example, assume the group chose "time together" as a target trait. Observable characteristics might be: families attend sports and school program functions as a family unit. They take walks, go on picnics, or just sit together talking. They play indoor and outdoor games together.

In the next step, the Strengths Model connects family interest and practice to the Development of Literacy. Using materials directly connected to the healthy traits of families and the observable characteristics of those traits gives meaning to the function and form of literate behavior.

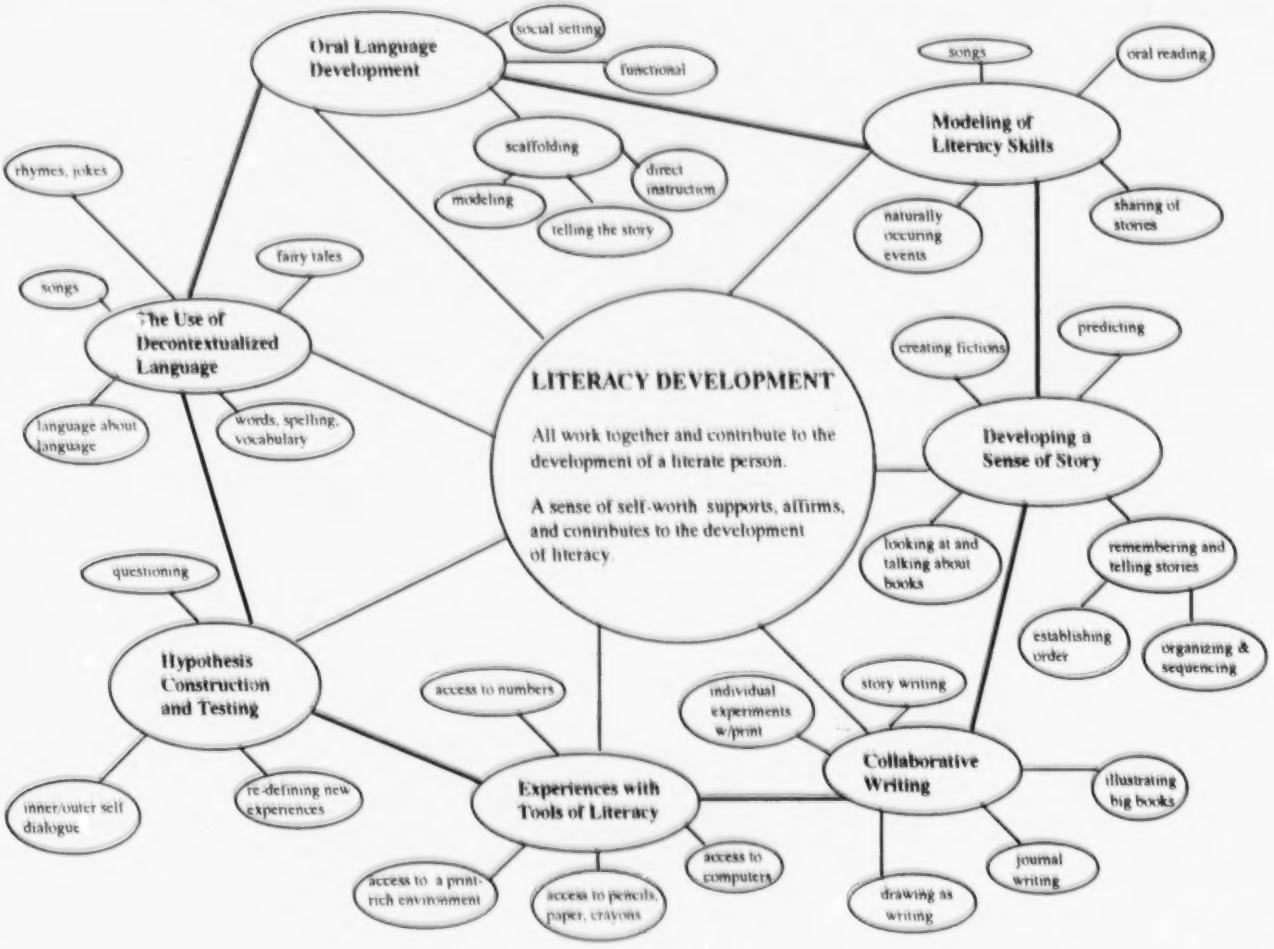
Recognizing strengths of families and using the aspects of wellness as a focus for curriculum says to the participants in the program that they are important, and what they say matters. What follows is a heightened sense of self-worth, an absolutely necessary attribute in the process of adult education. Improvement in self-esteem supports, affirms, and contributes to the development of literacy in a number of ways, for example:

- Parents are more likely to take risks, to share their triumphs and their failures with others in the class, both verbally and in writing.
- They are willing to experiment with language and learning and less afraid to make mistakes.
- They are less reluctant to model literacy skills for their children, more apt to read aloud, tell stories, sing, and participate in word play.

- They are willing to participate in a teaching/learning environment with their children, understanding that reciprocal education is a legitimate function of the family.

Each of these ideas is directly related to the development of basic skills in the family education program and in the home and illustrates the connection between traits of healthy families and the development of literacy. The graphic points out the connection:

- Healthy families talk together, which naturally leads to the development of oral language and the confidence to reveal thoughts and ideas outside the home.
- Healthy families share stories of their history and make predictions about the future, connecting the sense of story to the modeling of literacy skills.
- Healthy families provide a multitude of experiences for their members, among those will be experiences with crayons, paints, pencils, paper and other tools of literacy.
- Healthy families learn to question, construct hypotheses, and test them out in times of play and in times of work, helping each other sort out thinking and put words to thought, which can later develop into reading and writing abilities.



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Finally, a Strengths Model individualizes a "Course of Action." Once a family identifies its strengths and healthy traits, those strengths form the core of a family support plan, such as the plan designed by Dunst, et al in 1990. This plan will mobilize resources to help families meet their needs for improved literacy as well as other needs. For example:

- One family's concerns include the fact that the family is dependent upon AFDC for support. The mother cannot get even an entry level job because she lacks education. The mother also is concerned about her 4-year-old, who lacks skills necessary for school readiness.
- Needs include: a GED and employability skills for the mother; child care while she attends classes; preschool for the child.

The family strength that may serve as a resource is "encouragement of individuals." In the advisory session, during which the student sets her goals, she will be reminded to list those individuals upon whom she will depend for encouragement and support when she needs a boost. Is there someone who will drive her to class? Someone who will baby-sit the younger child? Someone who might fix dinner when the mother needs to study for her test?

- Other resources and support will be listed, such as the strength of the family as demonstrated in their ability to adapt. She may be asked to write about the successful move from an abusive or unpleasant situation and the coping strategies she garnered to succeed.

- She will determine a course of action and develop an action plan. The strength that will help her here is her commitment to her family. She may be encouraged to write a personal mission statement in which that commitment shines through.

As the class determines the family strengths already in place and identifies those for development, the instructor also prepares an action plan, focusing on the listed observable traits and gathering ideas for activities and lessons. For example, if the group selected "time together" as one of the significant characteristics for emphasis, the teacher will:

- collect menus from the families' favorite restaurants for reading and math lessons. Discussions will include a focus on family interaction and quality time together, using meal time as a sharing experience, emphasizing that home conversation is one of the most critical issues in development of intelligence and readiness for school;

- find Little League brochures, scouting manuals, zoo posters, museum notices, city park and recreation schedules, etc. for lessons which focus on reading, computation, and life skills;

- use family oriented games in the classroom setting to teach sequencing, rules procedure, and sportsmanship;

- bring TV guide and newspaper TV sections for discussion purposes, focusing not only on literacy skills acquisition, but also bringing in ideas related to TV watching;

- help families celebrate with each other, taking advantage of the opportunity to teach planning;

- include music and movement as teaching and learning tools;

- make family story telling and family story writing priorities in all components of the program.

Every program and every teacher can follow a Strengths Model for Learning by teaching to students interests, learning styles, and various intelligences. Beyond that, teachers can learn family systems theory, learn strategies for demonstrating empathy and expertise, relate learning to life cycle phases, become familiar with a variety of Strengths Models, design activities–using a family focus–which will engage students and help them acquire the skills to meet their goals. The outcome objectives will be in place that will connect social/emotional or affective issues with academic, cognitively-oriented goals.

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Further information on the Strengths Model for Learning and the Family Portfolio may be obtained from the National Center for Family Literacy, 325 W. Main, #200, Louisville, KY 40202 (502) 584-1133.

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# LVA/GTE Family Literacy Project

Michael Buchholz
Vice President of Field Services
LVA National Office

*Beginning in early 1990 Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) and many in its network of affiliate programs began to implement a "customer driven strategy." Since many students were reporting that their primary reason for seeking literacy services was a desire to read to their children, affiliates began to design instruction around this specific goal.*

After a 1990 survey of the LVA network's 400 literacy programs indicated that only 8% of the affiliates were offering some form of family literacy services, LVA recognized the interest and potential in this area and formed a partnership with the GTE Foundation. This multi-year, multi-phase project fostered a tremendous growth in family literacy services over the next five years. Our most recent survey indicates that approximately 50% of LVA affiliates are now offering family literacy instruction. Following the LVA philosophy of meeting each student's individual goal, family literacy has became a dynamic service delivery model.

While LVA is not surprised with this success, it is important to understand both the reasons for the growth and the strategies used to expand the program within the Literacy Volunteers network. From a student-centered educational approach, instruction will be most successful when it is meeting the goals identified by the student. Family or intergenerational literacy is a highly motivational approach since it meets one of the most important goals of parents: the success of their children. During the instructional process parents learn the importance of reading to their children and improve their own reading and writing skills.

A recent research study by the Center for Law and Education reveals that parents who encourage their children at home and get involved with their schools can make a major difference in their children's academic success. The study suggests two reasons why parental involvement makes a difference. First, it helps children bond with their teachers and with the school. Secondly, and possibly the strongest indicator of why literacy programs should be providing family literacy services, is that teachers tend to have higher expectations of children whose parents are involved.

**"A recent research study by the Center for Law and Education reveals that parents who encourage their children at home and get involved with their schools can make a major difference in their children's academic success."**

Understanding the importance of both reading to children and parental involvement in education, LVA has fostered the development of family literacy services in a variety of ways. With funding from the GTE Foundation, pilot family literacy sites were established in six states in 1990 - 1991. The lessons learned from these sites were published in a handbook, How to Add Family Literacy to Your Program. Four additional sites were added the following year.

The GTE Foundation-sponsored Children's Book Distribution Project encouraged further expansion of services. Over 100 LVA programs received $300 mini-grants to purchase children's books. Affiliates involved parents in the selection of the books, thereby increasing the parents' understanding of selecting good books for their children.

Building on the success of this project, the GTE Foundation expanded its involvement by creating three new family literacy initiatives. In conjunction with Literacy Volunteers of America's 1994 annual conference in San Diego, a Family Literacy Institute was held with 65 LVA literacy programs in attendance. Experts in the field of family literacy provided a "research and practice focus" and experienced literacy providers interacted with their colleagues. The Institute will be presented again at LVA's 1995 conference in Buffalo, New York.

The second initiative's goal is to expand the telecommunication system started by LVA - New York State and create a Family Literacy Communication Network nationally. During the first phase over 60 LVA users added on-line technology to their list of resources. By the end of 1995, the network will expand to 50 additional literacy programs.

A third area of involvement for the LVA/GTE family literacy initiatives has been the addition of two Family Literacy Learning Centers. LVA Brazos County, Texas and the York County Literacy Council, Pennsylvania will incorporate computer-based instruction in family literacy pilot projects.

These initiatives and the commitment of the dedicated literacy professionals throughout the LVA network have resulted in the dramatic increase in both the quantity and quality of services provided to parents. LVA will continue to promote the development of family literacy services as a primary focus area.

Each time a student decides to read to his or her child, we are rewarded twice for our efforts.

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For further information about the LVA/GTE project or LVA's family literacy publications contact Literacy Volunteers of America, 5795 Widewaters Parkway, Syracuse, NY 13214; 315/445-800; E-mail: Lvanat@aol.com.

LVA's *How to Add Family Literacy to Your Program* has recently been updated and includes an appendix of LVA affiliates and details about their current family literacy programs.

***Visions of Family Literacy:** continued from page 2*

programs - book reading and talk about books. While not the only component of family literacy programs by any means, adults reading with children is an important part of most family literacy programs, one that can bridge adults' and children's literacy development, whatever level of intensity and comprehensiveness. Adults reading with children holds the promise of achieving better and more lasting results than the more traditional separate adult and children's literacy programs.

I see the bridge as moving us forward, developing and advancing children's and adults' literacies and also connecting territories, in this case adults' and children's learning. In making this connection, this bridge offers a vehicle for parents to develop parenting skills in support of their children's learning and for deepening the quality of parent-child relationships and interactions.

**"Family literacy programs can take advantage of the dual learning opportunities and represent richer possibilites for adults and children..."**

So what does the reading research reveal that can inform practices in family literacy programs so a stronger effect will result? Research in the 1970's focused on showing that reading is not just receiving but giving the words meaning, breathing life into them. A story from my daughter, an assistant teacher in a kindergarten, illustrates one child's early awareness of the constructive nature of reading. For her sharing time, the child brought a safety subway card describing how to behave on escalators. An early reader, she read the do's and don'ts to the class. When she finished, she told her classmates that the other side was in Spanish. "Read it," one of the others said. She responded that she could say the words but couldn't read it because she didn't know Spanish. She didn't need research to tell her that we need to know the meaning of the words, relate to the experience, and fill in the gaps between what's stated and what's assumed.

In the 1980's, research focused on showing that reading is not a separate bookworm activity but a very social activity. Research demonstrated that a lot of the language and thinking development on which reading depends comes through talk during reading.

These are the ideas that have made their way into adult literacy and developmental reading programs. Reading as meaning making and reading as a social activity are ideas that family literacy programs in their book reading portions can use to great advantage. Beals, DeTemple, & Dickinson's (1994) home-school study of literacy development with 80 low-income children from 3rd and 4th grade found that the use of rich oral language, whether or not books are involved, was critical to language and literacy development. If language development is critical, why not just talk? Why worry about books? It seems that books function as a vehicle for communication, a prop for talk.

Another important strand in reading research was the increasing recognition that we need, from the beginning, to take into account the abilities required for mature reading by building in those experiences. We know from many studies that we basically do pretty well teaching children to read. We also know that things deteriorate quickly in the 4th grade when the demands shift from learning to read to reading to learn.

Why? Partly because, compared to storybooks and conversations, textbook material is often longer, about places and times outside some children's experience, and contains new vocabulary. Familiarity - as well as the props of conversation: shared experiences, gestures, the ability to pick up on clues in the listener's expression - are lacking.

What helps in longer text to negotiate meaning without the clues of familiarity and conversation? What's needed for successful mature reading? Some of the requirements are knowledge of the world, vocabulary, and the ability to understand information without context and when we're writing, to communicate it to others so they can understand it. It becomes clear that book reading provides for this learning by introducing new words and providing a chance to discuss books, to interpret, and to reflect on language. But, the full value of reading can only be realized when the adult and child engage in conversations that support meaning construction.

By the late 1980's, the theoretical groundwork was laid for intervention programs in which book reading, accompanied by communication, play a central role. It is not surprising that this is when family literacy programs began to proliferate. *First Teachers: A Family Literacy Handbook for Parents, Policy-makers, and Literacy Providers*, a book describing 10 family literacy programs, was published in 1989.

**Snapshots of Programs**

*Bridges to Literacy* (Dickinson, 1994) describes several programs that support an important point: that family literacy programs are a place to foster the kind of book reading that will lead to meaningful educational development for adults and children.

Snapshot # 1: Arnold and Whitehurst's (1994) Dialogic Reading Program focuses on language development. This work shows that reading picture books in the home can have a causal effect on the development of language skills. The program is based on three principles: evocative techniques to encourage children to take an active role during story time; parental feedback that expands on what the child says, models the use of language, and offers praise; and progressive change in adult standards for the children.

Over time, dialogic reading gradually reverses the typical pattern of storybook reading so the child becomes the teller of stories and the adult becomes the active listener. The role for the adult is to prompt, expand, and reward the child's efforts to talk.

- Finding: Interactive reading can promote children's language development.
- Practical implication: Provide parents with the experiences and tools so they can read with their children in ways that promote children's language development and provide the adults with insight into literacy development.

Snapshot # 2: To change how mothers read to their children, Patricia Edwards (1994) introduced a program with three phases: coaching, peer modeling, and parent-child interaction. The program fosters adults' learning, acknowledges the importance of reflection in the learning process, and utilizes writing activities.

At the end of each book-reading session, parents were asked to evaluate its effectiveness by filling out a Parent's Response Sheet and completing a Parent's Learning Log. The Parent's Response Sheet allowed each parent to reflect on the session as it came to a close, focus on its key points, and select one point to work on during the week. This practice acknowledges the importance of choice in the learning process. Recording progress on daily or weekly log sheets and keeping them in a binder are approaches to issues of documentation and measuring progress.

- Finding: Parents can be brought into the documentation and assessment process.
- Implication: Weave reflection and adult learning into work with adults around reading to children.

Snapshot #3: One of the questions that concerned Ruth Handel and me as we developed Family Reading was how family literacy programs can make explicit connections between reading to children and adult reading development. Two aspects of Family Reading (Handel & Goldsmith, 1994) explicitly foster adults' development. First, we include adult discussion of the children's book. For example, in relation to *The Little Red Hen*, participants talk first anecdotally about when they were the little red hen or the lazy friends and then more generally about how to deal with issues of responsibility and power. Second, we provide an adult reading that allows adults to use the reading strategy (like prediction or relating reading to personal experience) they are using with their child in their own reading.

**"Family literacy programs offer an opportunity for community concerns and cultural practices to inform curriculum development."**

What we've learned from our observations, interviews and videotaping of parents is that over time, adults take on new roles. Family literacy programs can become a place for parents to think about education as well as a place where techniques and strategies for involvement and advocacy can be discussed, refined, revised, and supported.

- Finding: Participation in family reading programs allows adults to take on new and expanded roles.
- Practical Implication: Shape the content of a program so it fosters adults' taking on new roles and provides a place for adults to discuss and reinforce these new roles for each other.

Snapshot #4: Elizabeth Segel (1994) in Beginning With Books uses an interesting technique with staff of the new programs that accomplishes a number of goals. She believes the quality of books and the process of book selection are crucial to the success of this brief and inexpensive intervention.

**"Family literacy programs can become a place for parents to think about education as well as a place where techniques and strategies for involvement and advocacy can be discussed... and supported."**

So that staff will buy into the process and so books will be appropriate, she uses the following technique. She chooses 20 - 25 appealing high-quality yet inexpensive books and brings them to an agency participating in Beginning With Books. She shows the books, pointing out special features, and asks staff to select three for parent packets. Parents and staff can be book evaluators.

One program uses the Beginning With Books approach with an ESL population. The goal: increase the social significance of literacy in family life by incorporating community cultural forms and social issues into the content of literacy activities. This reflects some of the research findings – reading as a constructive act and as a social process. Family literacy programs offer an opportunity for community concerns and cultural practices to inform curriculum development. In particular, having parents choose books in relation to family and community concerns is a way to increase the social significance of literacy.

- Finding: Bringing participants in the choosing and decision making process fosters involvement and learning.
- Implication: Use the "choice of children's books" to link instruction and assessment. Having parents' as book choosers and evaluators can bridge home and school literacies.

These snapshots suggest some family literacy program models that put into practice what we know of literacy development as constructive and social and that lay the groundwork for mature reading. We talk of family literacy as a strengths model, not a deficit model (see Meta Potts article). Some of what we see in these snapshots embodies strength: drawing on parent's knowledge and experience to inform instruction, drawing on intrinsic motivation, drawing on a positive, adult role, creating a home-school connection. Implicit in many of these characteristics is the existence of two-way traffic on the bridge.

There is a poem by the Senegalese poet Sedar Senghor in which he unites childhood to Eden and present to past with the line "un pont de douceur les relie," ***a tender bridge connects them***. Author Ashley Bryan drew on Senghor's metaphor when he expressed the hope his African tales will be ***tender bridges reaching out across distances of time and space***. Perhaps not a bad way to think about family literacy programs.

***Visions Of Family Literacy*** *adapts a presentation made on November 2, 1994 at the Family Literacy Institute that preceded the 1994 LVA Conference in San Diego, California. For the substance of this paper, I am indebted to the work of my colleagues in reading and family literacy. In terms of the shaping of the presentation on which this paper is based, I thank Caroline Beverstock and AnnMarie Tevlin for their willing ears and helpful comments.*

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# Reaching Families in Rural Communites

Susan E. Perkins, Program Coordinator
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*"Reading to my children is not important.*
*When they get to school, their teachers will make sure they get what they need to know."*
paraphrased remark of a parent during initial meeting for Even Start

Thanks to a demonstration project called Even Start, parents of young children are changing this misconception about the critical role parents play in their children's learning. At the same time they are strengthening their own comprehension and computational skills. This intergenerational approach promotes adult education through early childhood interventions. Parents are encouraged to read to their children, tell stories, share creative and active fun time together as a family.

The Even Start philosophy reinforces and expands the qualities of strong families through parent education at 400 family literacy projects across the United States. For Even Start, family literacy is defined as engaging adults and children in lifelong learning experiences. Parents are learning the importance of reading to and interacting with their children before they enter school. Schools are seeing the benefits in children entering kindergarten and first grade ready to learn.

This evolving family literacy approach shows great promise and has real impact by encompassing rural outreach in a family centered, community-based effort. A home-based plan of personal outreach to those isolated from services by emotional and geographic distance has been effective in creating a successful literacy program that is adapted to each family member's age, experience, and interests.

The T-S-T BOCES Even Start program, in four rural school districts in southcentral New York was designed to include these seven elements which have been identified as important for a model program:

**Identification and Recruitment** of families in rural areas depends on informal networks of people who know people. Adults, with children under 8 years old, who wish to complete high school are recommended to Even Start by long-term residents of the community, ministers, grocery store owners, volunteer firemen, food pantry coordinators, school counselors, and preschool teachers. Recruitment by referral is connecting people to people. Having someone already known to the family introduce the Even Start Family Educator creates "seamless delivery of service" and communicates respect and concern.

**Screening and Preparation** is accomplished through a series of meetings between the family members and the Family Educator. This is a chance for everyone to get to know each other, understand the goals of Even Start and discuss how it might work for the individuals in the family. Some assessments are done by the Family Educator regarding the appropriateness of the program for the family. Family members learn what participation in the Even Start program would involve and make a choice to join. This is a family decision because this is a family program, participation by at least one child under eight years old and one adult over 18 with interest in improving their academic skills is required.

**Program Design and Support Services** are intended to be family centered, based on what families have identified as their educational needs. Support services are provided to break down barriers to learning and range from tangible services such as transportation and child care—so the parent can attend adult education classes—to interpersonal supports such as parent groups, new friends, access to school services or domestic violence counseling.

**Home-based Programs** include regular home visits with planned cognitive activities the parents initiate with their children; a lending library of books and puzzles; opportunity for teaching parenting tips; time to respond to daily stress or family crisis; referrals to other services and encouraging family progress toward their goals. An emphasis on functional literacy in parenting and early child development reinforces instructional programs.

**Instructional Programs** include adult education options such as GED classes, tutorials (home or school-based) or GRASP (Giving Regional Adults a Study Program); community-based Family Center activities, for example CPR classes, toy making workshops, parent support groups and field trips to BOCES Vocational Center, Ithaca's Sciencenter, Burnett Park Zoo, Medical Centers in Syracuse and Sayre, supermarkets and food cooperatives.

**Staff Development** inservices and regular professional development workshops cover information on Identifying Attention Deficit Disorder Behavior, Adapting to Learning Disabilities, Alcoholism and Impacts on Family Dynamics, Building Self Esteem, and Stress Management among others.

**Collaborations** or partnerships with other community members are important because no agency or family can be successful alone. Connections with schools, churches, libraries, preschools, health providers, and businesses all contribute to supporting lifelong learning for everyone.

**What are we learning about providing family literacy programs in rural areas?**

- **Human contact is magic**. Adults with poor social skills benefit from one-to-one interactions, personal support and assistance in problem solving. Positive contact with the outside world is possible with professionals who become the bridge to the larger community (Barr, 1992). Learning happens best and growth is affirmed effectively when human beings come together.
- **Empowerment matters**. Family Educators assist family members to identify and work toward their own goals. This strengths-based model works from the philosophy that all families have positive qualities on which to build. It is important to take time to listen to what families have to say. Asking simple questions such as "How do you spend time together as a family?" "What is one thing you enjoy doing with your child?" helps to identify the things that are going well.

Finding common interests, skills and abilities such as crafts, cooking, computers, games, carpentry, cosmetics, gives the human service professional a way to become a partner with the family members.

**"Collaborations or partnerships with other community members are important because no agency or family can be successful alone."**

When the implementation of the program is participant driven, parents "develop feelings of ownership over results, and are more likely later on to take initiative with and on behalf of their children" (Cochran, 1994). "We asked for training in Infant CPR and we got it!" one happy parent remarked.

- **Community collaborations are critical**. Meetings with other outreach workers from Head Start, Early Intervention programs, Literacy Volunteers, Committee on Special Education benefit Family Educators through mutual support, and increase the understanding of other programs' services, eligibility requirements and referral processes. Parent representation contributes to the success of these cooperative ventures. Working together with other agencies, organizations, and providers builds a stronger community.
- **Teachers learn, learners teach**. Everyone involved in the process teaches from her or his knowledge and experience and learns from others. Family Educators report attitudinal changes themselves, saying, "Before I got involved in this program, I thought people on welfare were all taking advantage of the system; now I see how hard it is for families to make it."

**What changes do we see in Even Start families?**

Adults who were "school phobic" are bringing young children into their school's Family Center and have kindergarteners adjusting well to their classrooms. Withdrawn parents read more to their children and interact with them more frequently. Reluctant parents assert their opinions, are more responsive to their child's educational needs, and have become more proactive with their children's schools.

There are important impacts on children, too. Children are reading more and even very young children are spending more time with books. They are learning the importance of education by seeing their parents attend classes. Children feel more confident in group settings with or without their parents present. Children are identified for counseling and other remedial supports earlier.

Finally, the Even Start project is continually teaching us to appreciate the value of partnerships among parents, children and educators. We are learning that attitude shifts do not cost money, mutual respect is not expensive, being friendly and supportive does not diminish the importance of the educational accomplishments. This is not a case of "us" vs. "them," this is a community development process in which everyone benefits. Reform starts with changing beliefs. Life's challenges are opportunities for education and for learning.

For further information about the TST BOCES Even Start Project, contact: Susan Perkins, TST BOCES, 301 South Geneva Street, Room G-10, Ithaca, NY 14850, 607/277-8602.

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# From the Editor's Desk

The National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) at the University of Pennsylvania publishes policy briefs and technical reports on adult literacy topics and has three publications related to family literacy:

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Gadsden, Vivan L. (1994). *Understanding Family Literacy: Conceptual Issues Facing the Field.*

The relative absence of theoretical frameworks in the family literacy field presents problems in developing long-term agendas. However, it also creates opportunities for literacy specialists to examine conceptual issues for developing the field and determining its scope. This report explores these issues within the context of recent child/adult literacy, family development, and family support efforts, summarizing research and program factors that contribute to popular conceptions of family literacy. The report suggests that two related questions be examined: (a) what constitutes literacy support to families with varied cultural, social, and political histories and (b) how is the concept of family support defined and interpreted by literacy specialists who have vastly different notions about the purposes of literacy within families and about who decides what the purposes should be. The report concludes by providing conceptual considerations for the development of a framework and suggesting an integrative, interdisciplinary approach, distinctive but based in the larger family support movement.

TR94-02 20 pages $7.00

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Gadsden, Vivian L., Scheffer, Ludo C.P. & Hardman, Joel (1994). *Children, Parents, and Families: An Annotated Bibliography on Literacy Development In and Out of Program Settings.*

This annotated bibliography describes selected studies and reports on a range of issues related to family literacy in multiple contexts and includes seven categories of citations on topics ranging from parent-child relationships to intergenerational literacy and cultural/contextual studies. The works cited represent an effort to clarify the interdisciplinary nature of family literacy, which includes the fields of reading, developmental psychology, and sociology. The selected studies provide different perspectives on family and parent-child literacy and contribute to an interdisciplinary database on issues of adult and family-related literacy efforts as the field of family literacy emerges.

TR94-04 70 pages $11.00

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Puchner, Laurel D. (1993). *Early Childhood, Family and Health Issues in Literacy: International Perspectives.*

This paper examines early childhood development, family, health, and literacy, placing particular emphasis on the need to consider the interrelationships among these factors when attempting to use literacy to improve the quality of life of individuals in developing countries. The paper provides a conceptual model of the interrelationships among the factors and then individually discusses the topics of early childhood development and literacy, women and literacy, family issues in literacy, and health and literacy. The author argues that literacy programs need to be integrated with the social lives of individuals in order to bring about changes in human development and provides examples of ways in which such integration may be done. The paper includes and annotated bibliography of over 41 books and articles on topics pertaining to the discussion.

IP93-02 36 pages $8.00

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To order Document No. TR94-02, TR94-04, or IP93-02, send check or money order payable to NCAL/UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, to Dissemination, National Center on Adult Literacy, 3910 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3111.

*(Thanks to NCAL for permission to reprint the above information.)*

## From the Editor's Desk (cont.)

If you use America Online (AOL) or have direct access to the Internet, there are many online resources available for family literacy activities. One of the best is the National Parent Information Network (NPIN), accessible through AOL's Internet Center or via the World Wide Web (WWW).

Using America Online, go to the Internet Center, choose Gopher and WAIS Databases, and then the "Kids" folder. Inside the "Kids" folder you'll find the "Best of K-12 Internet Resources" and within that, NPIN. If you access the WWW directly with browser software like Netscape or Mosaic, the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) for the National Parent Information Network is http://www.prairienet.org/htmls/eric/npin/npinhome.html. NPIN offers a wide range of information and family literacy programs may find "Ideas for Community Programs and Activities" and "Resources for Parent Educators" most useful.

Another excellent Internet resource is PARENTS AskERIC, part of the larger AskERIC service. To use AskERIC services, e-mail your question to: askeric@ericir.syr.edu and a customized response—"search of ERIC databases, referrals to other Internet resources or to relevant organizations, and, if available, the full text of an ERIC Digest or some other relevant full-text information"— will be linked back with 48 hours.

NYSERNet's Empire Internet Schoolhouse, available through AOL's Internet Center contains information that "promotes collaboration and partnership in the educational community to meet the needs of students and educators at every level."

Within America Online's Education area (not part of the Internet), AOL offers outstanding resources including its own Parents' Information Network, The National Parenting Center, KIDSNET, The National Principals' Center and more. According to America Online, "we believe that one of the positive hallmarks of the 1990s and beyond will be increasing parental involvement in the education and development of their children. AOL's Parents' Information Network is intended to be and become the first integrated full-service set of online resources for parents offered by a commercial online network. It offers articles from major educational periodicals, databases of useful information, and parent-oriented guides to other parts of AOL."

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